

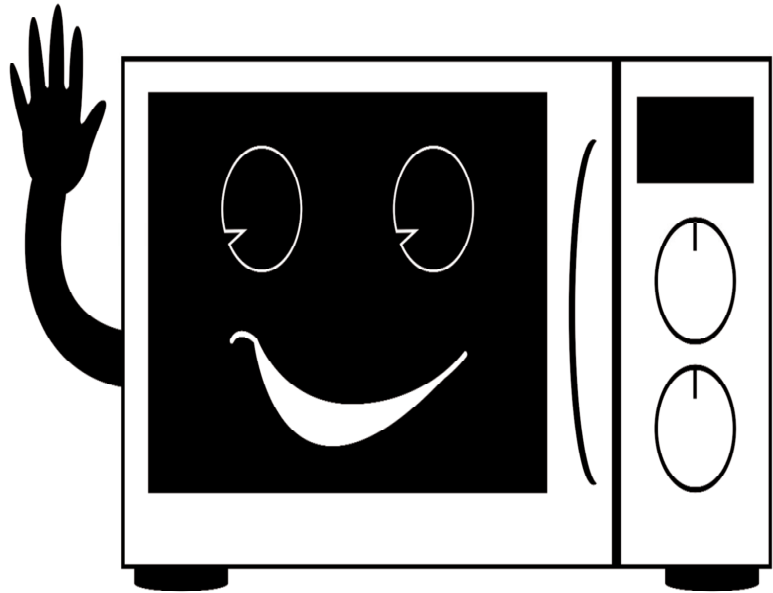
# Microwave Cooking: A Guide

## Microwave

### Meet the Microwave:

Microwave ovens are now essential in most kitchens. For many people, microwaves act as expensive coffee heaters, leftover reheaters, and popcorn poppers. But, as with other moist cooking methods, microwaving foods is a great way to quickly cook foods with a little liquid. This method helps the food retain nutrients, flavor, and color. Extra fats are not needed to keep the foods from sticking to any pans, and usually foods that are high in fats and sugars tend to cook too fast or burn when cooked in the microwave. Small amounts of water can quickly turn into steam in the microwave. This is especially useful when cooking vegetables and fish, which are foods that you want to be moist and steamed.

Microwaves are invisible high-frequency sound waves that travel in a straight line. Simply put, heat is produced inside the food. The microwaves “excite” the water molecules in the food, and this causes friction that produces heat within the food. The interior of the food is heated by conduction. Stirring, rotating, turning, or rearranging the food during cooking helps



**Microwave**

with conduction and creates even cooking.

Power levels (which sometimes are on a 1-10 scale, with others at just high, medium, and low) are a way to control the amount of cooking power going into a food. Sometimes this is accomplished by allowing spaced resting times between microwave bursts. Other times, ovens control the amount of microwaves that enter the cavity. Lowering the power levels in the microwave is similar to turning the heat down on the top of your range. Some foods are best cooked slowly – this goes for the microwave, too.

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## What Should I Make in a Microwave?

Microwaves are not for every kind of food. You may be disappointed if you try fried or deep fried foods, cakes, waffles, pancakes, hard-cooked eggs, and pastries – items that need a crisp, dry exterior just don't do well in the microwave. Foods that require long, slow cooking times for the development of flavor or tenderness are also best cooked by other methods.

Most foods that you want to cook in a microwave are those that need a bit of liquid and some time to steam. Think fish, fruit, vegetables, etc.

You can also reheat leftovers or defrost food to get it ready for a meal. Defrosting takes time. Defrosting times can vary depending on the amount, the shape, and the density of the food. Defrosting in the microwave is usually done at a lower power and includes an allowance for standing time afterwards. Impatient cooks that try to speed this process along tend to accidentally overcook the edges of foods while defrosting.

When you microwave most foods, they should be covered.

Use plastic wrap or a glass lid when you want the food to steam. Paper towels or clean dish towels are good for foods that you want to have a slightly less steamed exterior – think baked potatoes and baked goods.

## Microwave Tips:

Allow for standing time. Heat continues to travel to the center of the food and cook it *after* the microwave shuts off. This continues the cooking time and allows for even heating. Not allowing for standing time frequently results in overcooking your food.

The size and the shape of the food makes a difference in the way it cooks. If more of the outside edges of the food are exposed to the microwaves, the cooking time will be lower. Flat, thin foods will heat faster than foods that are cut into chunky shapes.

Doubling the amount of food to microwave nearly always doubles the cooking time. Microwaves are great for one potato (4 minutes), but, if you want to cook four potatoes, you might as well do it on top of the stove instead, since that method would take only 15 minutes.

Here's a general rule of thumb – when you're doubling a recipe in the microwave, increase the cooking time by a little less than twice as long as you would take to cook the single recipe. If you're making four times as much food, cook everything for slightly less than four times the original time.

Does that make sense? How will *you* use your microwave?